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**Environment Department, Doña Ana County to Host
Colonias Environmental Issues Summit**

(Santa Fe, NM) — The New Mexico Environment Department and Doña Ana County are kicking off a series of forums focused on border and colonias environmental issues with a community summit to set up the framework for improving the quality of life in these underserved communities.

A Technical Advisory Group meeting of state and federal legislators, industry and business representatives and state and local government leaders is scheduled for November 10, 2005, at 2 p.m., followed by the Environmental Issues Summit that will include the general public and community at 6:30 p.m. Members of the media are invited to both meetings, which will be held at the Court Youth Center, 402 West Court Avenue, Las Cruces.

Childcare and transportation services will be provided to members of the public, if required. For details, please call Laura Chacon, NMED, at (505) 524-6300.

Part of a months-long comprehensive assessment of border communities and their needs, the summit will provide an overview for a subsequent series of Colonias and Rural Community Juntas to follow in 2006.

“These forums will give a voice and a place at the table to a group of people who haven’t had adequate access to basic local, state and federal resources,” NMED Secretary Ron Curry said. “Walking through these communities and seeing the environmental and health issues they face and lack of basic infrastructure leaves a lasting impression.”

Key to the success of this initiative is the involvement of all levels of community-building entities ranging from service providers, such as energy companies and water utilities, to regional businesses that provide jobs and economic development, but also generate environmental health concerns. Finally, the inclusion of local, state and federal agencies and elected officials is essential to see the implementation of corrective policies.

Guided by residents and community leaders, the summit and subsequent juntas are designed to serve as a model for developing solutions to rural and underserved community environmental concerns. The framework of community input coupled with industry and business representation and government involvement can be replicated in other Southwestern colonias and underserved rural communities.

For more information, contact Adam Rankin, NMED Communications Director, at (505) 827-0314.